University of Alberta

Conflict in Schools and Possible Resolution Strategies

by

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled Conflict in Schools and Possible Resolution Strategies submitted by Robert Tony Mazzotta in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Educational Policy Studies in Educational Administration.

Dr. Joe Fris

Dr. Ken Ward

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Abstract

The study of conflict is one that is never ending and always fascinating. In completing this thesis, I had hoped to find the answer to the question, "What are the strategies commonly used for dealing with conflict?" This thesis is based upon information gathered through literature and eight interviews where the focus was conflict. The participants were asked to discuss an incident of conflict that occurred between him/herself and either another teacher, support staff member or administrator. This information was then grouped in concordance with the themes found in the literature for comparisons and contrasts. The themes of this study were: definitions of conflict, types of conflict, sources and causes of conflict, effects of conflict, and strategies for conflict resolution. Through the data collection process, three other themes emerged. These were criteria for conflict definition, significant conflict, and positive and negative conflict. The study concludes with various recommendations and implications for practice.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

> The potential for conflict permeates the relations of humankind and that potential is a force for health and growth as well as for destruction. ... No group can be wholly harmonious...for such a group would be empty of process and structure (James MacGregor Burns).

> Conflict is defined as an interactive state manifested in incompatibility, disagreement, or difference within or between social entities such as individuals, groups, or organizations. The sources of the conflict are usually rooted in incompatible goals, cognitions, or emotions. Conflict, therefore, like power or communication, is not a tangible or objective entity. Conflict is subject to the interpretation of the minds of those who are party to it. More and more social scientists are coming to realize-and to demonstrate-that conflict itself is no evil, but rather a phenomenon which can have constructive or destructive effects depending upon its management (Hanson, 1991, p. 273).

IDENTIFICATION OF THE PROBLEM

In the administrative world, be it education related or otherwise, there is sure to be a variety of conflict. Conflict is natural to human nature. It is difficult to avoid in most situations and the best that one can hope for is a peaceful and acceptable resolution to the conflict at hand so that the parties involved in the conflict can co-exist in their environment. It is easy for conflict to begin. As soon as two or more people face a situation where one believes or does one thing and the other believes or does something else, the groundwork for conflict has been laid. What makes conflict, and the study of conflict, so interesting is that many situations of conflict are different from each other, although experience has shown that many cases of conflict can

begin for the same types of reasons and can usually be resolved using the same types of strategies or techniques. It is important to understand the facts in a conflict case, decide upon appropriate strategies for conflict resolution and follow up to ensure that no further problems will arise.

PROBLEM

In preparation of this study, it has come to my attention that there is insufficient literature to clearly state what methods are used when resolving conflict in schools. There is ample information and documentation when studying conflict among teachers or administrators or support staff. There is not, however adequate information about conflict resolution strategies between teachers, support staff and administrators, and any combination thereof. In this study I hope to find some data for this problem. Therefore, my main questions are, "What are the strategies commonly used for dealing with conflict," and "How can these strategies be assessed for effectiveness and practicality in the workplace?"

Research Objectives

The research objectives are to determine: (a) how individuals define conflict and what criteria are used in defining conflict, (b) the positive and/or negative effects the conflict has on the individuals, (c) effective strategies for resolving negative conflict in schools, (d) the role of emotions in cases of conflict, and (e) how individuals judge conflict as being "significant." The different groups that will be studied are teachers, support staff members, and administrators. Positive conflict tends to improve the working environment and maintain a healthy attitude in the workplace whereas negative conflict can be destructive and detrimental to a healthy work environment. Hence, the

perceived positive and negative effects of conflict that exist among adults in an educational setting along with suggested strategies for resolution or management of negative conflict will be the basis of this study.

SUB-PROBLEMS OF THE STUDY

In reviewing the problem and the objectives of this study, it becomes apparent that there are a number of corresponding sub-problems or sub-questions that will arise in completing this study. In addressing these sub-problems, the strength and reliability of the study will increase.

1. How do the participants define conflict? What criteria is used in defining conflict?
2. How is conflict deemed to be positive or negative?
3. What are the strategies used for resolving conflict?
4. What is the role of emotions in conflict and conflict resolution?
5. How do participants judge conflict as being "significant?"

DEFINITION OF TERMS

The terms related to the topic of this study, as they will be used, are defined below.

Educational setting: the school where the adults interviewed for this study are employed.

Teacher: an individual who is accredited by a university and certified by a Teachers' Association or Government Authority to teach in a given province.

Support staff: an individual who is employed by a school district to assist teachers or administrators either in the classroom or the school, and whose duties are outlined by an administrator.

Administrator: an individual assigned by a school board to carry out the required educational duties at the school or district level, and to monitor the daily operations of a school.

Conflict: any situation where a dispute or argument ensues, at the conscious or sub-conscious level, as a result of differing opinions. This situation can be seen as either positive and beneficial, or negative, detrimental or dangerous, dependent upon the perspective taken by the involved participants.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This review will look at a number of sets of information about conflict. It is broken down into five categories: (a) definitions of conflict, (b) types of conflict, (c) sources and causes of conflict, (d) effects of conflict, and (e) strategies for conflict resolution.

DEFINITIONS OF CONFLICT

In the literature, a variety of definitions for conflict emerged. "Conflict is a situation or state between at least two interdependent parties, which is characterized by perceived differences that the parties evaluate as negative. This often results in negative emotional states and behaviors intended to control the other parties in the interaction " (Katz and Lawyer, 1994, p. viii). Friend and Cook (1992) add that "conflict is any situation in which one person (or group) perceives that another person (or group) is interfering with his or her goal attainment" (p. 118). A very similar definition of conflict is given by Grab (1994): "a conflict exists when incompatible goals, resources or rewards are sought simultaneously. Conflict situations are those in which the concerns of two or more people or groups appear incompatible" (p. 37). In his most recent book, Owens (1995) offers a simple, yet compelling definition of conflict. He states that conflict is a set of "divergent, or apparently divergent views," and that those "views are incompatible" (p. 147). Other definitions of conflict, although somewhat dated in comparison to those mentioned above, offer similar insight into defining conflict. "Conflict is an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties, who perceive incompatible goals, scarce rewards, and interference from the other party in

achieving their goals" (Wilmot and Wilmot, 1983, p. 9). As Thomas (1976) states, "conflict is the process which begins when one party perceives that the other has frustrated or is about to frustrate some concern of his" (p. 3).

In the above definitions, the reader is given the impression that all conflict is negative. This is not always the case as Deutsch (1973) points out: "conflict may occur when there is no perceived or actual incompatibility of goals. Thus if a husband and wife are in conflict about how to treat their son's mosquito bites, it is not because they have mutually exclusive goals; here their goals are concordant. ...conflict can occur in a cooperative or a competitive context, and the processes of conflict resolution that are likely to be displayed will be strongly influenced by the context within which the conflict occurs" (pp. 10-11). Finally, conflict may be verbal or nonverbal, manifest or latent, and it may range from intellectual jousting or malicious gossip all the way to the use of physical force" (French, Kast and Rosenzweig, 1985, p. 265).

As is evident in all of the definitions cited thus far, in order for conflict to exist, three elements are necessary: incompatibility of goals and/or views, expressed dissatisfaction, either verbally or nonverbally, of this incompatibility, and some sort of action taken to rectify the situation. When these three key elements of conflict are evident, then it is safe to assume that a situation of conflict does in fact exist and that if the situations is left unchecked, the potential for serious problems is enhanced.

TYPES OF CONFLICT

Conflict can present itself in a variety of forms as well as in a variety of formats. "Constructive or functional conflicts, as Robbins (1974) states, supports the goals of the organization and improve performance. Destructive

or dysfunctional conflicts, on the other hand, hinder organizational performance and should be eradicated" (Lindelow and Scott, 1989, p. 340). In the various readings dealing with conflict, there emerged eight major types of conflict: intrapersonal, interpersonal, intragroup, intergroup, intraorganizational, person-group, intra-sender, and inter-sender.

Intrapersonal

The intrapersonal conflict occurs when two or more different and conflicting responses are demanded of one person (Grab, 1994, p. 37). This conflict emerges within the self and emerges because the individual has difficulty in choosing personal goals. There are three types of conflict that occur when there is a choice: (a) choosing between two positive outcomes, (b) choosing between a positive and a negative outcome, and (c) choosing between two negative outcomes (Zuelke and Willerman, 1992, pp. 2-3). The first outcome is difficult in that, although the situation appears to be win-win, there is a choice to be made and will the best one be made. The second outcome is easiest because it is clear which choice is best. The third outcome is similar to the first in that a difficult decision needs to be made among two negative options. Another source of intrapersonal conflict is "cognitive dissonance" which is the "holding of two incompatible beliefs. Here an individual is psychologically uncomfortable and is motivated to achieve a new state of cognitive equilibrium, or consonance, by either obtaining more information or by choosing a belief" (Zuelke and Willerman, 1992, p. 3).

Interpersonal

A second type of conflict is interpersonal, which is "when two or more individuals are in opposition" (Grab, 1994, p. 37). The basis for this

opposition can be anything that the two or more groups disagree upon and for which they are unwilling or unable to find a common resolution. This type of conflict can be characterized by using two examples; conflict between individuals with different goals, and conflict between individuals with the same goals. In the first example, two individuals who want different outcomes must settle for the same outcome. In the second example, individuals have the same goal, but they cannot all access it (Friend and Cook, 1992).

Intragroup

The third type of conflict discussed in the literature is intragroup conflict which occurs among sub-groups of an organization with incompatible goals (Grab, 1994). In this conflict group, issues in an organization will divide the organization along intellectual or substantive lines or emotional or affective lines. "If the conflict is intellectually based, then group members feel strongly about certain issues and want them protected" (Zuelke and Willerman, 1992, pp. 5-6).

Intergroup

Intergroup conflict is the fourth type of conflict and this occurs between established groups within an organization (Grab, 1994). "When contests or activities between classes or groups lead to conflict, one group may feel it is superior to another group" (Zuelke and Willerman, 1992, p. 7).

Intraorganizational

The fifth type of conflict is intraorganizational and can be depicted in vertical, horizontal, line staff, or role conflict. Vertical conflict occurs within the hierarchical structure of authority, such as a principal and teacher.

Horizontal conflict occurs across the ranks of equal individuals, such as teachers or different groups (special education, bilingual, counselors). Line staff conflict occurs between the school's administration and central office, and can be based on any number of issues (repairs, funding, resources). Role conflict occurs when there is confusion regarding role expectations, perceptions, or judgements. This intraorganizational conflict can be further categorized into three areas: (a) professional/bureaucratic, where teachers and principals have different goals and expectations, (b) ability/authority, where the right to make decisions is balanced against having the knowledge and ability to do so, and (c) autonomy/coordination, where as teachers become more professionalized and gain control over decisions, they tend to become more autonomous. At the same time, the organizational need is for more cooperation and coordination (Zuelke and Willerman, 1992).

Person-group

The sixth type of conflict is person-group. Grab (1994) explains that this conflict occurs when one individual is in conflict with the remainder of the group.

The last two types of conflict were not found throughout the literature. Rather, Grab (1994) makes an exception by singling them out as distinct types of conflict whereas others may have simply incorporated them into any of the six conflict types already mentioned.

Intrasender

"Intrasender conflict occurs when rules and expectations are applied unfairly and unequally" (Grab, 1994, p. 37). For example, a principal may

have certain rules and expectations for one set of teachers, but not others. This could happen when the sender himself is unsure of who should be doing what.

Intersender

The final type of conflict is "intersender conflict, when different expectations are placed on an individual or group" (Grab, 1994, p. 37). Here, two or more individuals may conflict each other when addressing the same individual or group in regards to what that individual's or group's expectations are.

These eight types of conflict can be used to categorize any conflict which occurs in any individual, group or organization. The next section of this review looks at the sources or causes of conflict.

SOURCES AND CAUSES OF CONFLICT

The sources and causes of conflict are as abundant as the number of conflicts themselves. "Conflict is a matter of perception. If none of the parties perceive the situation to be problematic, then conflict does not exist. For conflict to move to an active stage, one or more of the parties must perceive the status quo as problematic and seek to alter the situation (Katz and Lawyer, 1993, p. 341). In order to facilitate this presentation, sources and causes of conflict will be grouped along four themes: (a) communication problems, (b) organizational structure, (c) human factors, and (d) limited resources.

Communication

Communication problems arise when there is no regular feedback, expectations are ill-defined, there are hidden agendas, a lack of candor, and an absence of trust (Lindelow and Scott, 1989, p. 341). Other communication difficulties can be noise, semantic differences and insufficient exchange of information (Grab, 1994, p. 38). Any one of these factors, either alone or in conjunction with others, can create a situation of conflict.

Organizational Structure

Another source of conflict is the organizational structure within which a group of individuals find themselves (Lindelow and Scott, 1989, p. 341). Here, there is little structure and routine. As participation increases, so does the rate of conflict. Although the number of conflicts went up with participation, the number of major incidents of conflict went down. Power espoused on individuals can facilitate coordination and concurrently reduce conflict (p. 342). Other causes leading to organizational structure conflicts are the size of the organization, staff promotions, the presence of an overwhelming amount of information which requires the decision maker's consideration (Grab, 1994, p. 38). Leadership style and pattern of communications among various components of the organization can also lead to organizational conflict (Friend and Cook, 1992, p. 121).

Human Factors

The third source of conflict revolves around human factors (Lindelow and Scott, 1989, p. 342). Increased conflict will occur when there are high authoritarianism, high dogmatism and low self-esteem personalities. Differing value systems or goal systems also lead to conflict. As well, when people are

dissatisfied or unable to realize their aspirations, conflicts will occur. As such, conflict promoting interactions at interpersonal or intergroup levels could lead to competition, domination and provocation (Grab, 1994, p. 38).

Limited Resources

The final source or cause of conflict deals with limited resources. Competition over limited resources can lead to conflict between teachers and/or departments (Lindelow and Scott, 1989, p. 342). This shortage of resources can impact other organizational members causing interpersonal conflict when two or more individuals have the same goal, but they cannot all access it (Friend and Cook, 1992, p. 120).

Overt and Covert Conflict

One other basis of conflict depends on whether the conflict is overt or covert. In overt conflict, parties tend to perceive themselves as having incompatible outcomes (what an individual wants). This type of conflict can be expressed through a difference of needs, beliefs (deep felt priority), and interests (what causes you to choose a particular solution). Conflict of needs grows out of differences in the outcomes, personal goals, and aspirations of interdependent parties in the presence of scarce or undistributable resources (Katz and Lawyer, 1993, p. 9). Covert conflict emerges in a relationship as a consequence of psychological projection. This is the splitting off of unwanted emotions and behaviors, projecting them onto another, and investing the other with those emotions or behaviors (p. 10). These sources of conflict, although not an exhaustive list, presents an overall picture of what causes conflict. The next section will look at the effects of conflict.

EFFECTS OF CONFLICT

"As Stephen Robbins (1974) notes, the word conflict has a negative connotation for most individuals. Indeed, many if not most conflict situations are disturbing to participants and observers alike, and many conflicts lead to destructive ends" (Lindelow and Scott, 1989, p. 338). While it is true that most conflict can have a negative connotation, it is a two-sided coin. Conflict can be disruptive and destructive or it can be a source of creativity and constructive action (Lindelow and Scott, 1989), and as such, needs to be examined from both perspectives. Lindelow and Scott (1989) list the following effects of negative conflict:

-diverts energy from the task at hand,

-destroys morale,

-polarizes individuals and groups,

-deepens differences,

-obstructs cooperative action,

-produces irresponsible behavior,

-creates suspicion and distrust, and

-decreases productivity (p. 338).

Katz and Lawyer (1993) add the following consequences of negative conflict:

-minor differences can escalate into major conflicts,

-the number of issues in the conflict can increase,

-specifics can give way to global concerns,

-the intention can shift from getting a specific interest satisfied to beating the other parties at all costs, and

-the number of parties can increase, making it even more difficult to de-escalate the conflict (pp. 12-13).

Finally, Grab (1994) suggest the following may occur due to negative conflict:

-too much conflict may reduce or stop productivity with a subsequent negative effect on the organization,

-unresolved, prolonged conflicts may have destructive consequences such as irritability and uncontrollable anxiety caused by prolonged stress, guilt, and feelings of self-doubt,

-indecisiveness, physical and psychological exhaustion and deterioration,

-coordination of efforts, job satisfaction, morale and productivity may be diminished or destroyed (pp. 38-39).

Positive conflict, on the other hand, has a number of beneficial effects that tend to improve an individual's or group's situation or outlook. Lindelow and Scott (1989) list the following effects of positive conflict:

-opens up an issue in a confronting manner,

-develops clarification of an issue,

-increases involvement,

-improves problem solving quality,

-provides more spontaneity in communication,

-is needed for growth, and

-strengthens a relationship when creatively resolved (p. 339).

Katz and Lawyer (1993) look at positive conflict as having benefits for both the individual and the group. "Conflict can provide an opportunity for creativity, renewed energy, drama, development, and growth to individuals, groups, and organizations, resulting in increased cohesion and trust" (p. 10). Positive conflict can also lead to:

-more effective personal and organizational performance,

-reconciliation of the interests of the disputing parties,

-sharpened sense of identity and solidarity,

-interaction and internal change,

-clarification of the real problem,

-increased trust, productivity, and results, and

-group unity (pp. 11-12).

Grab (1994) offers these positive benefits of conflict:

-positive conflict can keep organizations dynamic,

-person-positive conflict leads to recreation in both thought and organization,

-without conflict, schools and school systems would remain stagnant and apathetic,

-insufficient conflict results in lethargy, apathy, and leaving things unchallenged (p. 39).

Grab (1994) also goes on to state that while excessive conflict may be detrimental, reasonable levels of conflict can:

-lead to catharsis which is good for the soul and for a relationship,

-improve [one's] mind-frame for resolving difficulties,

-identify suppressed feelings,

-prompt leaders to evaluate policies, procedures and rules to prevent a repeat of the situation,

-stimulate individuals to work harder and smarter, and

-[be] healthy and invigorating when it brings out new ideas and thoughts (p. 39).

Having looked at both the negative and positive effects of conflict, it is now possible to speculate that three distinct attitudes or feelings may emerge as a result of a situation of conflict. Participants may feel dominance or imposition, resulting in resentment and sometimes destructive consequences. They may succumb to withdrawal or avoidance, resulting in resentment and lowered

self-esteem. Finally, participants in a conflict may seek compromise or resolution, resulting in at least some beneficial consequences being achieved (Katz and Lawyer, 1993, p. 13). Any or all of these feelings and attitudes are possible when conflict arises.

The above mentioned attitudes also involve the aspect of thymos. According to Plato (1968), thymos causes humans to seek recognition of personal worth, including recognition of the things they believe in or value. This tendency we now call the need for self-esteem. In order for an individual's thymos to be acknowledged, the devalued party in the conflict needs to speak using "I" statements as opposed to "you" statements, so that his or her self-worth is acknowledged and the conflict can be resolved. As Fris (1994, p. 29) points out, when the forces of thymos are not addressed, considerable time and energy are squandered. Getting esteem needs out into the open is a powerful strategy in managing conflicts effectively.

The next and final section of this review will look at the strategies available for resolving or managing conflict.

STRATEGIES FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION

"Conflict management is a communication process for changing destructive emotional states into constructive states that allow working out a joint solution in a conflict (Katz and Lawyer, 1994, p. 1). Blake and Mouton (1964) have developed a five level system that looks at the conflict handling behavior found in certain cases. By understanding these behaviors, it is possible to focus on appropriate resolution strategies. These strategies include: (a) competing, (b) withdrawing, (c) smoothing, (d) compromising, and (e) collaboration. Competing refers to an all-out competition so that there is only "one winner." Withdrawing or avoidance is the opposite. Here an

individual is unable to deal with a problem and will simply ignore it or deny its existence. Smoothing or accommodation exhibits high cooperation, but low assertiveness in dealing with conflict. In this case one party engaged in the conflict will be satisfied while the other will feel ignored. Compromising in a conflict emphasizes that all parties win, but each member must give up something in order for this to happen, so in essence, they both lose out to a certain degree. Collaboration is regarded as the highest level of conflict resolution. Here there is a high level of cooperation and assertiveness and all parties involved in the conflict win. "Effort, effective communication, and an open minded attitude [are] needed to ensure that the concerns of both sides are fully articulated and addressed" (Borisoff & Victor, 1989, p. 28).

In studying the types of conflict behavior, Gibb (1961) made reference to the climate in which communication takes place. A defensive or threatening climate is characterized by communication that is evaluative, controlling, strategic, neutral, superior, and certain. A supportive climate is characterized by communication that is descriptive, problem oriented, spontaneous, empathic, equal, and provisional (Borisoff & Victor, 1989). In knowing the type of climate in which you are dealing facilitates the selection of verbal and non-verbal strategies required for conflict resolution. It is here where the majority of Gibb's research states that a supportive climate is conducive to open communication and that descriptive speech aids open communication. Here, descriptive speech "tends to arouse a minimum of uncertainty. The listener perceives genuine requests for information" (Borisoff & Victor, 1989, p. 29). There are five areas of verbal strategies for descriptive speech. The first deals with admitting one's assertions. When an individual removes the barriers to his or her own assertions and states these openly, open dialogue will result. Stating issues clearly and specifically is

another effective strategy. By avoiding generalities, it is much easier to achieve a successful resolution to a conflict. Semantic selection is also important as it is necessary to keep in mind the denotative and connotative meanings of words. Semantic obstacles to communication must also be avoided. The use of slang, stereotyping and automatic phrasing, such as tags, fillers and pauses, tend to impede open communication. Finally, syntactic selection is also important. It is wise to avoid threatening statements, hostile joking and sarcasm, and hostile questioning if an individual wants to achieve positive and successful dialogue.

Along with the verbal strategies necessary for conflict resolution, there exist non-verbal strategies that play a valuable role in conflict resolution. Appearance, body movement or kinesics, eye contact or oculesics, touching or haptics, and the use of personal space can all influence the way in which a message can be interpreted. Each of these non-verbal strategies plays an important role in determining how well or how poorly open communication will occur and how successful the conflict resolution will be. Familiarity with these strategies is also important when dealing with latent conflict; a conflict which has not yet been visibly expressed (French, Kast and Rosenzweig, 1985). These subtle signals may be indicative of an underlying conflict within an individual. An effective administrator will be able to recognize these signs and take appropriate action before the conflict erupts and causes serious interruption in one's daily routine.

The above mentioned strategies are by no means the sole strategies available for conflict resolution. Margolis and Tewel (1988) suggest that effective listening can resolve many conflicts. "Effective listening builds trust, communicates respect, enhances the principal's power [in a school setting], and frequently eliminates anger" (Margolis & Tewel, 1998, p. 4). Another

method deals with information control. Here, "the refusal to distribute confidential and restricted information, and the hoarding of information" takes place (Knebel, 1993, p. 9). The underlying premise is that knowledge or information is power and by using this power appropriately conflicts can be resolved. Two other methods are information distortion which is a tactic used to present two different perspectives of a situation, and information channels which is a controlling of who gets what information.

Other strategies that can be used by administrators to resolve conflict include using power to punish or to reward, and using formal authority, which is a function of the hierarchical structure, to regulate and resolve conflict. Stalling for time, denigration, coalition forming, environmental control, humor and documentation are all possible methods in dealing with conflict so that a positive and successful resolution can occur (Loewen, 1983). Fris (1994) makes mention of using time strategically. Rather than reacting right away and perhaps making an error, Fris advocates to avoid reacting while angry. He suggests waiting for an opportunity to exact vengeance for perceived slights or betrayals, and for individuals to steel themselves for unpleasant confrontations, etc. Unlike avoidance which does not deal with the problem, strategic use of time is a management technique that will facilitate a resolution to a conflict when all participants are ready to act rationally.

Boulding (1962) referred to three general methods of conflict resolution: (a) avoidance through lack of contact; (b) conquest with the emergence of victors and vanquished; and (c) procedural resolution through reconciliation involving value changes, bargaining where each side settles for less, and third party awards. Follett (1940) also suggested three methods: (a) domination involving a victory of one side over the other, (b) compromise

which forces each side to lose, and (c) creative integration where something new accommodates the interests of all opponents.

Research studies conducted more recently found a number of similarities with previous studies. Holder (1991) discovered four common strategies among principals, namely: (a) gathering or providing information, (b) coercion or the use of power and authority, (c) negotiation, and (d) seeking outside intervention. Maurer (1991) developed five models of persuasion to deal with conflict. These were: (a) the sanctions model of rewards and punishments, (b) the model of directives whereby directions are given by the administration, (c) the compromise and bargaining model, (d) the model of expert advice and experience to provide direction, and (e) the developer model where expressed opinions are blended to a suitable resolution. Kirkwood (1990) found that interpersonal communication skills, such as listening and speaking, are most important whereas Kurtz (1988) found that careful planning, an understanding of human behavior, and experiential background are vital to successful conflict resolution.

In the literature thus far, it is becoming clear that three major themes of resolution are emerging. They are negotiating, managing information and influencing. Table three summarizes these findings. According to Katz and Lawyer (1994), negotiation is a communication process for enabling disputing partners to achieve a mutually agreed-on outcome with respect to their differences (p. 1). The ASCD (1993) defines negotiation as an active problem solving process that consists of examining conflicting positions through communication, in the hope of finding common underlying interests that can lead to agreement (p. 3). The theme of negotiation is by far the most popular according to the literature. In the negotiation framework, there are five aspects which recur throughout the literature: (a) competing, (b) withdrawing,

(c) accommodating, (d) compromising, and (e) collaboration. These are the same five aspects described earlier by Blake and Mouton (1964). The ASCD (1993) uses a framework for collaborative negotiation. Their six step method is beneficial in resolving conflict through collaboration which is the method of choice. First, plan the negotiation. Decide if the conflict is negotiable and separate needs from positions. Try to see the other side's point of view. Next, create a climate for negotiating. Establish trust and rapport, and use apologies and compliments where appropriate. From here, inform and question. Use "I" statements and inform the other side as to your needs and ask about the other side's needs. The fourth step is to find common ground. Identify problems that effect both sides and try to consider the issues in terms of shared needs. Then, brainstorm for solutions. Freely suggest ideas for solving the problem and withhold judgment. Finally, choose the best solution. Narrow down the suggestions for solutions to the most promising ones for a lasting resolution (source: Raider and Coleman, 1992). Katz and Lawyer (1993) observe that conflict managers should be flexible in moving from negotiation to conflict management and back again. They developed a ten step process to aid in negotiating conflict:

-identify and clarify interests--listen reflectively to distinguish between positions and interests. Find out their positions, then elicit the interests underlying the positions (the reasons why the positions are held),
-develop a problem statement to focus the parties on the desired state,
-brainstorm options for a possible solution,
-evaluate alternatives--rule out impossible solutions,
-decide on a solution--ideal solution for all parties,
-develop an action plan--who will do what, when,
-build in an evaluation process for the effectiveness of the plan,

-process experience--talk about the experiences in resolving the conflict thus far,

-implement the action plan--actual resolution of the situation, and

-evaluate results--were results achieved? If so, how? (pp. 45-49).

The second and third themes that emerge when dealing with conflict resolution are managing information and influence. Although the themes are distinct, they are used in conjunction with each other, and some conflict managers will move from one to the next and back again. Managing information refers to listening to both sides of the conflict and then controlling, distorting or channeling the information to achieve the desired end. Influence has its stronghold in the relationships existing in conflict situations and the individual who has the power to control. This individual can use power to reward or to punish. He or she may also use their formal authority to settle a conflict or to instruct one of the involved parties to end the conflict or to accommodate the other party's needs. Grab (1994) suggests five steps in resolving conflict through information management and influence. First, collect information to get a clear and accurate picture of what is going on. Second, clarify the issues and defuse hostility by listening to all sides. Basic causes of the conflict must be evaluated. Third, move the involved parties to neutral territory. Fourth, define and develop possible courses of action, and fifth, select the best solution and develop an action plan for implementation (p. 40). Lindelow and Scott (1989) highlight some differing techniques to resolve conflict. In part, they suggest creating superordinate goals when possible. This way, a highly valued goal of two conflicting parties can only be reached by cooperating with each other. As well, creative problem solving can resolve conflict by bringing conflicting parties together to discuss their differences [which] can lead to increased understanding, clarification of

differences, and constructive collaboration (p. 347). Changes in organizational structure are also possible. Group members can be transferred or exchanged, special coordinating or conflict management positions can be created, interlocking team structures can be established, and grievance and appeal systems can be created. Also, an increase in contact between conflicting parties can reduce barriers to communication (p. 349). Finally, Lindelow and Scott (1989) advocate the use of authoritative command. Authoritative command can solve conflicts quickly and neatly as long as this authority is not misused or overused (p. 351). It is clear how these two themes are interrelated when analyzing the methods of conflict resolution associated with each style. The key, however, to successful conflict resolution or management is knowing when to use the appropriate theme at the appropriate time.

In summarizing the strategies for resolution, one finds that three distinct groups of strategies emerge: (a) negotiating, this includes competing, withdrawing, smoothing, compromising; (b) managing information, this includes listening, information control, distortion or channeling; and (c) influencing, which involves the use of power, authority, and stalling for time. The three groups each use a different approach which is valuable in that the person trying to resolve the conflict can select the group of strategies that will best suit the type of conflict.

SUMMARY

In summarizing the literature presented in this review, a number of expectations or conclusions come to mind when addressing conflict. In regards to definitions of conflict, this researcher expects conflict to be defined as a situation where incompatible goals or views are present, and that these

views are expressed either verbally or non-verbally, at the conscious level. Some conflict may not be expressed consciously, but it is important to note that even if the conflict remains at the sub-conscious level in an individual, it is still a conflict that perhaps has yet to be expressed. The final element of conflict is that some sort of action must be taken to rectify the situation, at either the conscious or sub-conscious level.

The types of conflict that one can expect to encounter are intrapersonal, interpersonal, intragroup, intergroup, intraorganizational, person-group, intrasender and intersender conflict. These eight groups encompass the most common types of conflict and it is expected that all types of conflict will fall into one of these categories.

In reviewing the sources and causes of conflict, one can conclude that communication problems, structure of the organization, human factors or limited resources are the principal causes of conflict. Few sources of literature detailed what the causes of conflict may be because it is such a vast area. However, these four headings of conflict sources and causes aid in grouping these factors.

In summarizing the effects of conflict, it is evident that there are numerous effects, both positive and negative, of conflict. However, no mention is made that some conflict can be neutral resulting in advantages and disadvantages at the same time. As well, little is said about the feelings of self-worth or value that the participants may encounter in conflict.

The final area of the review dealt with the strategies proposed for conflict resolution. These strategies were grouped along three main themes: (a) negotiating, (b) managing information, and (c) influencing. Each theme was further broken down into strategies demonstrating the variety of ways one can resolve conflict.

The review of this literature forms a solid base upon which one can begin to better understand conflict and conflict resolution strategies. The findings of this study will be compared and contrasted to the literature and this will form the basis for discussion in chapter five.

TABLE ONE

TYPES OF CONFLICT

Intrapersonal

-two or more different and conflicting responses demanded of one person,

Interpersonal

-two or more individuals are in opposition,

Intragroup

-occurs between two or more sub-groups of an organization,

Intergroup

-occurs between two or more groups of an organization,

Intraorganizational

-vertical: hierarchical structure of authority,

-horizontal: across ranks of equal individuals,

-line staff: school administration and central office,

-role conflict: confusion regarding role expectations, perceptions, and judgements,

Person-group

-occurs between one individual and the remainder of the group,

Intra-sender

-occurs when rules and expectations are applied unfairly and unequally,

Inter-sender

-occurs when different expectations are placed on an individual or group.

TABLE TWO

SOURCES AND CAUSES OF CONFLICT

Communication problems

-lack of regular feedback, expectations ill-defined, hidden agendas, lack of candor, absence of trust, noise, semantic differences, insufficient exchange of information,

Organizational structure

-little structure and routine, power structure, size of the organization, staff promotions, numerous decisions to be made, leadership styles, patterns of communication,

Human factors

-high authoritarianism, high dogmatism, low self-esteem, differing value or goal systems, dissatisfaction,

Limited resources

-competition between individuals over scarce resources,

Overt conflict

-perceived incompatible outcomes, expressed difference of needs, beliefs, and interests,

Covert conflict

-consequence of psychological projection: splitting off of unwanted emotions and behaviors, projecting them onto another, and investing the other with those emotions or behaviors.

TABLE THREE

STRATEGIES FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Strategies	*Authors													
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	Frequency
NEGOTIATING														
competing	X				X	X								3
withdrawing	X				X									2
smoothing	X													1
compromising	X				X	X	X	X						5
collaboration	X													1
admitting one's assertions, stating issues clearly, semantic selection, semantic obstacles, syntactic selection (Gibb's verbal strategies)		X												1
appearance, body movement, eye contact, touching, personal space (Gibb's non-verbal strategies)		X												1
MANAGING INFORMATION														
listening			X				X		X	X				4
information control			X									X		2
information distortion			X									X		2
information channels			X									X		2

Strategies	*Authors													
INFLUENCE (relationships, power)														
power (to punish or reward)				X			X	X						3
formal authority				X				X						2
stalling for time, denigration, coalition forming, environmental control, expressed naiveté, escalation/confrontation, humor, documentation (Loewen)				X										1
creative integration						X								1
gathering information							X							1
outside intervention							X							1
effort, effective communication, open mindedness											X			1
personal expertise or experience								X		X				2
using time strategically													X	1

* 1) Blake and Mouton (1964)
2) Gibb (1961)
3) Margolis and Tewel (1988)
4) Loewen (1983)
5) Boulding (1962)
6) Follett (1940)
7) Holder (1991)
8) Maurer (1991)
9) Kirkwood (1990)
10) Kurtz (1988)
11) Borisoff and Victor (1989)
12) Knebel (1993)
13) Fris (1994)

CHAPTER THREE

METHOD

DESIGN

The design of the study revolves around the interviews of individuals who work in schools and who have experienced a case of negative conflict. Therefore, the type of study that will be carried out is an exploratory, qualitative study of conflict resolution strategies. I contacted eight adult individuals that work in schools who agreed to take part in the study. The individuals differ in their position within the school. Some are administrators, some are support staff members, and others are teachers. The information collected was compiled and analyzed for themes of conflict. The data were also grouped in terms of similar resolution and management strategies so that comparisons could be drawn in terms of how similar strategies can be used to solve a variety of conflict situations.

SAMPLE

The target population for this study is adults who work in schools. As mentioned above, they are administrators, support staff members, and teachers. The accessible population was a cross section of these individuals in the city of Edmonton as was the sample. I first acquired permission from the superintendent of schools for the Edmonton Public School Board. I then selected a variety of schools where I solicited the participation of individuals who were known to me prior to commencing my research. Hence, this study is based on a purposive sample of convenience. These schools consisted of elementary, junior and senior high schools in the public system, where a

variety of programs exist such as special needs, languages, learning and behavior disorder and where no special programs are in place. I selected four schools at the elementary level, two schools at the junior high level, and one school at the high school level. I finalized my selection to an elementary secretary, an elementary principal, two elementary teachers, two junior high teachers, one junior high secretary and one high school administrator. This improved the transferability of the findings because no one particular type of school was used and the schools selected could be any school. From here, I began setting up schedules to visit the schools and make initial contact, and then set up schedules to conduct the eight, semi-structured interviews for my study.

DATA COLLECTION

The data were collected using a semi-structured, audio recorded interview where the participant was given the opportunity to discuss a situation of conflict and how the situation was resolved or managed. These data were then transcribed, studied and analyzed so that comparisons with the literature could be made.

DATA ANALYSIS

Once all of the interviews had been completed, they were transcribed so that a written record of the interviews existed. They were then verified for accuracy by both myself and the interviewee and any errors were corrected. The next step was to open code the written transcriptions so that they would be easier to analyze. Once this was completed, categories were deductively established. From here, themes began to emerge. Finally, a comparison was

made among the categories and themes found in both the literature and the interviews.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH

The importance of this research is that the findings will be transferable to similar educational situations. Based on the information and findings from the literature and the interviews, administrators can avoid similar cases of conflicts by studying what happened elsewhere and by taking the necessary steps to avoid similar situations in their own schools. If the conflict appeared negative in the short term, a period of a few weeks, but positive in the long term, more than one month in duration, it was analyzed as a negative case of conflict as the immediate conflict problems and resolutions were studied throughout the study. Administrators can also look at the dynamics involved with the different groups studied and draw their own conclusions in how to establish a positive working environment. They will also be able to review the variety of conflict resolution or management techniques so that the appropriate measures can be taken if and when a conflict arises. Another aspect of great importance is that these findings will not have been found elsewhere in the literature and are thus, crucial components to assessing current and effective conflict resolution strategies in schools.

SUBSTANTIVE HYPOTHESES

My research hypotheses were: (a) conflict occurs more frequently between teachers than between support staff members, (b) conflict between teachers and administrators is more apt to occur than conflict between support staff and administrators, (c) conflict among teachers is usually a result of unequal distribution of teaching time and resources, (d) conflict between

support staff and administrators is usually a result of unsatisfactory job descriptions and time allotment as seen by support staff, (e) conflict between teachers and support staff is often due to differing personalities, and (f) conflict between teachers and administrators is usually based on unsatisfactory job assignments and duties, on the part of teachers. This is a key component that can lead to teachers feeling overworked, undervalued or simply, not liked by the administrator.

VALIDITY

Since this study is qualitative, the validity of the methods must be addressed as they should be addressed in any study. The first of those is external validity which is the degree to which the findings can be transferred to a similar situation. This study addressed the aspect of population validity by selecting schools that are mainstream schools. The schools were typical of what exists in education today and so the findings could be transferred to other situations. Another threat to external validity is the researcher effect. This was eliminated by using semi-structured interviews so that the same questions were asked and in the same order. To counter the effects of researcher expectancies, an attempt was made to have an external reader review and analyze the data analysis to verify its soundness and its validity. The second area of validity is internal validity which is the degree to which the research findings can be distorted by extraneous variables. This area is sub-divided into four threats. The first threat is history. As mentioned above, if a dramatic event occurred in the life of the interviewee or interviewer, an attempt to reschedule the interview would have taken place. History is also valuable in seeing when these findings could be applied again. By studying conflict in non-descript, or regular schools where no special programs exist,

the findings are applicable because the conflict can occur in any school setting. Maturation and mortality were not threats in this study because the study was based on a one time interview and was not a lengthy, on-going project. Instrumentation is the fourth threat and was avoided by using pre-formulated, semi-structured questions that were consistent throughout all the interviews. This allowed for the gathering of basic information and allowed for added depth and richness from those interviewees that had more to share than just the basic facts.

PARTICIPANTS OF THE STUDY

As previously mentioned, there were eight participants in the study from seven schools. Mary is a junior high teacher with three years teaching experience in Edmonton. Lori is a secretary in an elementary school and has been working as a secretary for more than twenty years. Michael is a junior high teacher with four years of teaching experience, and was the only male who took part in the study. Suzie is a secretary in a junior high school and has been employed with the district for about ten years. Shelly has been a principal in Edmonton for the previous four years whereas Rebecca has been a teacher in Edmonton for over fifteen years. Mary Ann is an administrator who, for the last two years, has worked in a high school. Finally, Madeleine is currently an elementary teacher with about fifteen years experience as well. All, but one, of the participants are employed in the greater Edmonton area.

PILOT STUDY

The pilot study took place in early February of 1996. Mary was the participant in that study and her interview is included in the eight interviews collected. After completing the pilot study, some adjustments were made to

the interview schedule to clarify the sub-problems of the study. Since some of the sub-problems were not addressed in the pilot study, a letter was addressed to Mary. In that, she was asked to submit, in writing, her responses to four questions revolving around conflict. This was done so that her entire interview was balanced and so that it paralleled the other interviews that followed. She was more than willing to comply and sent me her additional responses which are included in the findings chapter of this study.

DELIMITATIONS

The delimitations of this study are as follows:

1. The findings of this study are limited to adults in Edmonton working in similar educational settings who have experienced similar situations of conflict.
2. Since the majority of participants in the study were female, this may influence the strategies used for conflict resolution.

LIMITATIONS

The findings of this study are limited in certain regards.

1. The interview responses restrict the findings based on the personal experiences of the participants.
2. The recommendations are limited to individuals who view conflict and conflict resolution in the same way as the participants.
3. The conflict experiences recounted were those where the participants were the receivers of conflict and not the instigators of the conflict. This, too, may influence how the conflicts were resolved.

CODING

The process used to synthesize the data was open coding. The transcripts were read and as ideas emerged from the data, they were grouped along similar themes. These themes were then compared with the literature so that conclusions could be made.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

There were five main objectives to be determined by this study: (a) how individuals define conflict and what criteria are used in defining conflict, (b) the positive and negative effects the conflict has on the individuals, (c) possible strategies for resolving negative conflict in schools, (d) the role of emotions in cases of conflict, and (e) how individuals judge conflict as being significant. In addition, the difference between positive and negative conflict will be presented here.

DEFINITIONS OF CONFLICT

In reviewing the definitions of conflict, there is a theme that is evident. Three of the respondents clearly stated that conflict is based on a difference of opinion and that this difference is expressed either verbally or non-verbally. As Mary Ann states there "is a difference of opinion. A difference that has been expressed between two people." Lori's definition of conflict was "a difference of opinion; something that affects a person's [physical] well being or mental well being." Michael's definition was somewhat similar in that conflict is "a difference of opinion. A difference of opinions in ways you would do things between two people or more."

Two of the respondents defined conflict as the arise of a problem or where different goals collide because not everyone sees eye to eye on certain matters. Suzie stated that conflict is "a situation which arises between two people or maybe more than two people where your goals are different and the

way things happen in one office [are done differently]. It is when everyone does not see eye to eye."

Finally, the remaining theme of conflict revolved around the feelings of the individuals involved. Most of these feelings were negative or perceived to be negative. There was also a feeling of one's self-esteem being challenged or attacked and that an element of personal or psychological harm may result because of conflict. Shelly said conflict is when "people feel devalued. They feel insignificant or feel [that] their purpose is threatened. There is a devaluing aspect to one's self-esteem" and this leads to conflict. "Agreeing to disagree or having an element of incompatibility present" is what Rebecca adds to the definitions of conflict. She also adds that there "is a perceived behavior to be threatening or damaging and that hostile feelings are present." Finally, Madeleine adds that conflict can be "philosophical, emotional (internal) or psychological. It is a struggle, or a power struggle. It has to do with levels of power. As well, there is philosophical incompatibility, a disagreement or a sense of being at variance with someone."

These three themes of conflict offer a real and balanced definition of how educators today view conflict. They also assist in clarifying the thoughts of others whom may have difficulty in expressing what conflict is to them.

CRITERIA FOR CONFLICT DEFINITION

Once the participants of the study were asked their definition of conflict, they were also asked to elaborate on how they knew a situation of conflict was upon them, or what criteria they used for defining active conflict. The main theme evident in this regard was that verbal expression or some type of visible expression was used to signal active conflict. Lori notices verbal expression, body language, tone of voice, behavior and visual clues as

indicators of conflict. She added that conflict is looming when a person is ignoring you. As well, by taking stock of what is being said or not being said is a good indication as to where a situation stands between herself and others. Rebecca added that the feelings, the threatening feeling or the unhappiness were signs of conflict. Body language, facial expressions, arguments, fighting, and an underlying negative feeling. Something is not quite right, so she knows a conflict is either active or looming. Mary Ann knows when conflict exists because it is expressed verbally. For example, through a meeting process; you are watching or chairing a meeting and you can see people reacting. There may be anger, incompatibility, a marked difference of opinion, or clear body language indicating conflict. Finally, Madeleine adds that she knows conflict is active when parties stop communicating. This can be expressed through the use of body language or by the absence of verbal communication.

Another way of knowing conflict is active is through a visible difference in either attitude or expectations. Participants can see that there is a problem looming or happening by what is obviously taking place between the individuals in conflict. Beginning with Mary, she knew she had a conflict on her hands when there was a marked difference in attitude between herself and another teacher on staff. There was an unwillingness to compromise or be flexible, heightened tension and stress on Mary, and increasing amounts of energy and time being allotted to thinking and dealing with the situation that had become conflictual. Michael knows there is conflict when a clear difference occurs. If he is expecting to see something done one way, but it is done another way, a conflict may result. As well, when he cannot go about doing an activity he is supposed to do in a normal way. It sort of stops or

there is opposition of a feeling of saying 'no, you are not doing it right.' These are his indicators of active conflict.

One of the respondents mentioned a physical response to conflict. I thought this was worth mentioning as it illustrates how conflict can take its toll physically on a person. Shelly's response to the question evoked the reply that her response to conflict is physical. Her stomach is her best indicator. When something is not right, she can feel it in her gut.

The final response for conflict criteria simply revolved around an issue that won't go away. Suzie knows conflict exists when an issue of contempt carries on. When something cannot be dealt with right away and it builds within a person, it can turn into a major problem.

EFFECTS OF CONFLICT

The third area of this study focused on the effects that a conflict may have on an individual. These criteria are based on what the participant perceived the effect of the conflict to be on the individuals involved or on themselves. The main theme in this regard is that conflict had a mostly negative effect on the participants, with only one exception. Most feelings due to conflict left some of the participants feeling perhaps vulnerable or devalued.

In dealing with the effects of the conflict, I was able to gather some data as to how the conflicts affected each of the individuals' thymos, or sense of self-worth. Apart from what is mentioned above, some of the participants experienced additional angst due to the situations described and felt that their worth as a person had somehow been lessened. The effects of conflict can manifest themselves in a variety of ways on individuals. Mary explained that her situation of conflict took its toll on her through increased frustration and

tension, by feeling demeaned and disrespected, and through increased stress. Lori's conflict left her feeling negative because she wanted to make the new principal feel comfortable and not give the impression that she was questioning his authority. "I think it had a negative effect on me initially because I wanted to make him feel comfortable coming into a new school. I didn't want him to feel that I was questioning his authority being the new principal. And that he would construe it as lack of cooperation on my part." By using caution, she could not act in her natural manner. For Michael, the conflict he encountered resulted in his losing respect for the teacher in opposition to him. As well, he no longer wanted to be involved with the teacher in question. Suzie, on the other hand, felt satisfied in confronting the principal. By doing so, she did not become frustrated over the incidents because they were dealt with quickly and before they became difficult or onerous. In her words,

> ..well, the satisfaction I think of going in and letting him know how I felt was a form of satisfaction itself. I wasn't sitting there stewing about having to do a lot of things, whereas I'd go in and let him know and he'd know about it...

In the situation presented by Shelly, the effect of the conflict was quite different. Shelly was the third person involved and acted more as a mediator to a teacher-student conflict. Once the issue was settled, she sat back and reflected on the incident to discover why the conflict happened. By doing so, she realized that there was a problem with a school program. The conflict here, although initially negative, served a positive purpose in that it forced the staff to re-evaluate their positions on a number of issues, the main one being school programs. The conflict then led the way to improving the status quo and to preventing future conflict due to the same issue. Rebecca's teacher's aide felt inferior due to the conflict they encountered. They were both

unhappy and Rebecca felt bad for the way the aide felt although it was not directly her fault. As Rebecca states,

> ... I think it was where her self esteem had been threatened and maybe I threatened her. It was not a conscious thing on my part. But in hindsight, I can see sort of why it was happening, but I maybe should have recognized it and made comments to the principal for him to maybe include her in some of that, in that praise that he gave away so freely.

Mary Ann's situation paralleled Shelly's in that she, too, was a third party mediator, this time between two teachers. In this situation, the veteran teacher in conflict felt lousy and demoted from losing her department headship when moving to another department where a junior teacher was responsible for the department. It got to the point where she required medical assistance for the personal feelings she experienced. As she recalls,

> ... there was a big recognition, it was about feelings, and about feeling valued or feeling devalued. In terms of the younger one, it was 'you never tell me anything I do is good' and for the older one it was 'you left the room in a pigsty'. She felt devalued in that sense. She was entering a new department and no one sort of put out the red carpet for her. So that whole idea of thymos that we talked a lot about was at the bottom of a lot of these conflicts. Someone forgot to say thank you. Someone forgot to say please. And you build on that whole lack of self esteem. There was no self esteem.

Finally, Madeleine's conflict with her supervisor led her to resign her position and to avoid the current and any future conflict with that individual. In this case, there were also a number of personal events occurring at home that led to her decision. This is an important note because she would have kept the position and rode out the conflict if she did not have the personal factors influencing her decision.

EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Through the discussions I had with the participants, a number of strategies were brought up in detail or simply mentioned casually. Participants were asked to discuss the specific strategies they used in dealing with one specific conflict, and then, they were asked to mention any other strategies that they have used when dealing with conflict. The main theme that is apparent in the data is that open and honest communication is vital when resolving or managing conflict. In fact, six of the eight respondents mentioned that open discussion with careful listening and direct dialogue with the other party was the first approach taken to end the conflict. Suzie offered the strategy of speaking directly to the person involved. She said to be honest about your feelings and to listen attentively. She said going head to head with the individual is also important to find out the reason for the conflict. Shelly mentioned a number of strategies that she used for resolving conflict. It is important to calm down and to remain calm when resolving an issue. All individuals in conflict should also calm themselves before starting any resolution process. Brainstorm ideas as to how best solve the conflict. She has also given a teacher a day off to calm down and collect her thoughts and composure. It is vital that she be a good listener, that she let the participants know she cares and that she supports them. Also, she used humor to de-escalate the situation. Finally, if she is unsure how to solve a conflict, she will phone other colleagues and ask them for help or advice. When acting as a mediator, Mary Ann talks to each party individually, then sets up a meeting to discuss the issues. She will listen attentively to both sides of the issue and then start a dialogue between the two parties in hopes of ending the conflict. She also tries to use the 48 hour policy where she tries to resolve a conflict in this time frame, and once settled, it is no longer referred to. Madeleine's

strategies for conflict resolution included being straightforward with, and speaking directly with, the individual in opposition. She also suggested letting things cool down, taking a time out, laying low for awhile, then inviting the other individual(s) to discuss the situation over coffee. This will allow for a clear discussion of the issue, hopefully without any residual emotions.

Another theme in the effective strategies data dealt with being flexible towards the other party and by doing so, trying to show the advantages or disadvantages of an idea. Lori suggested showing the benefits of changing ideas and outlining the differences and benefits or disadvantages of each way. As well, she said it is important to consider a new idea and be willing to make a change if necessary. This strategy is useful in persuading the other party to change sides, perhaps slowly, and to gradually realize that they may have made a mistake.

The final strategy in resolving conflict was only mentioned by one participant, and that was avoidance. This strategy was used in the described case of conflict only. Avoidance was used because Madeleine did not have the energy or the desire to confront her superior on the matter, so she simply decided to leave the situation. Her words,

> I could have basically denounced this person and brought this problem to the attention of the board, or higher up, to the superintendent. But, I chose not to. I just decided that if that's the way it was going to be and I couldn't live with this situation, then I would remove myself from the situation and I left. I said it was for personal reasons that I was leaving. The strategies I did use were to basically avoid the problem and also, avoid all the political conflict that was going on. So I left.

Madeleine, in further discussions, mentioned that avoidance is no longer on her strategies list as this conflict was years ago. Today, she addresses the problem directly with the individual.

> So my strategy right now is to lay low, but approach the person, say let's go for coffee and discuss it, if you can do so. Before I think I would jump in too quickly and not give the other person a chance to assess the situation as well. I think that as I grow older, I've learned to deal with conflict better. I don't know why, maybe it's just more experience.

SIGNIFICANT CONFLICT

One of the themes that emerged during the discussions revolved around knowing when a conflict had become significant. The major criteria for this was time. Half of the participants mentioned that the amount of time spent dealing with an issue of conflict had a direct correlation to the significance of the conflict. Mary replied that a conflict is significant when it becomes an issue that takes time and energy away from other tasks. For Rebecca, an issue is significant if she lies in bed at night thinking about it. A conflict would also be significant if it changed her or if it alerted her to certain vital areas requiring the attention of an efficient and effective supervisor or administrator. Mary Ann's definition of significant conflict is when she spends ample time thinking about it. The more troublesome the incident, the more significant it is or can become. Finally, Madeleine classifies a conflict as significant

> based on how much sleep I lose over the issue. As well, if I go home and brood over it, it is more important that initially believed. Also, if there are repercussions over a conflict and/or if the higher ups want to know the reason for the conflict, this signals a significant conflict. Lastly, if my stress level rises, then I knows the conflict is in fact significant.

Another indicator of a conflict's significance is how it affects a person's daily routine. For Mary, "when a conflict inhibits my performance,

effectiveness or emotions, it is significant enough and demands attention." Suzie's barometer for conflictual significance is "when an issue interrupts my way of working and my efficiency. A situation that is continually growing and is interrupting me daily is significant."

Finally, another factor affecting a conflict's significance is what impact it has on an individual's reality as a whole. For example, if a conflict leads an individual to think deeply about what caused the conflict or why the conflict happened, then the conflict can be deemed significant. "A significant conflict," according to Shelly, "makes the people involved look at the purpose as to why certain things are done. The conflict makes the participants reflect and re-evaluate their purpose in the scheme of things."

POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE CONFLICT

The final group of information dealt with what positive or negative conflict is. The majority of the participants emphasized that positive conflict has one or more beneficial results whereas negative conflict will rarely have any benefits or advantages. Some examples of positive conflict are as follows:

Mary: positive conflict occurs when a problem or obstacle is being dealt with from both sides toward a common goal. It often includes a sense of trust, honesty, sincerity and relief on the part of all parties concerned.

Lori: knows conflict is a not a problem when her well being is not threatened. Positive conflict would be something that a person could possibly change her mind about.

Michael: positive conflict would be where you were working with a group of people and the situation became something that you did not think you could

get through, but there were not any bad feelings and the end result was achieved. It was a learning experience.

Suzie: all conflict is negative.

Shelly: all conflict is positive if handled correctly. You need to get the involved people to feel valued again, to feel a sense of purpose, and to feel recognized by their contribution or where they are at. Positive conflict means being able to forgive and forget and to move on.

Rebecca: positive conflict is when you have divergent thinking and thoughts that start working toward more positive thinking, or you change something so it works better, something superior results.

Mary Ann: positive conflict is whenever people express a different view, but there can be a greater learning. A greater understanding is achieved.

Madeleine: positive conflict is where in the end, there are positive outcomes. Something has been accomplished or something has changed for the better. Positive conflict leads to positive things, to changes.

Negative conflict could be summarized using the following excerpts:

Mary: occurs when a problem or obstacle is being dealt with, but each party involved is working toward a different goal by means of the same or common problem. Negative conflict includes different motivations toward the resolution of the conflict and the resolution is less easily found. It involves feelings of tension, stress, anger and frustration on all sides (parties).

Lori: would make me unhappy. As well, the conflict would be negative if it had a direct impact on my life, or my working conditions, livelihood or family.

Michael: negative conflict would involve emotions of hurt and disappointment. Feelings of not being able to get through it.

Suzie: it is when little things are not dealt with right away and they become a major problem.

Shelly: negative conflict is when individuals cannot forgive and forget. They continue to feel devalued.

Rebecca: negative conflict is when all your time is spent trying to resolve the conflict and nothing beneficial results. Everything else is left out.

Mary Ann: negative conflict can begin as negative and issues seem to be irreconcilable in the heat of the moment. However, if each party is given a chance to sit back, relax and reflect, then greater understanding can result. In essence, all conflict can end up being positive.

Madeleine: made no mention of negative conflict.

SUMMARY

This chapter in the study has presented a diverse, yet accurate account of how conflict is viewed by educators. It is by no means an exhaustive study, but it is indicative of how conflict is perceived by the individuals in the study, as recounted in their interviews. It is important to note that the information provided in this chapter clearly indicates that conflict in schools is an important issue and one that requires regular and immediate attention to avoid becoming detrimental and a hindrance to education itself.

CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION

This section of the study will compare what the literature suggests I should have found against what was actually found while completing the study. The comparisons include speculations about why differences, if any, exist.

Definitions of Conflict

According to the definitions of conflict in the literature, conflict is a situation where incompatible goals or views are present and that some sort of action is taken to rectify the situation. The data of the study are somewhat different; conflict is defined in terms of three key elements: (a) a difference of opinion that is expressed either verbally or non-verbally, (b) the presence of a problem or where different goals collide, and (c) accompanying negative feelings of being devalued or unworthy.

The two different aspects of conflict definition could be a result of the data being collected in an educational setting. The main focus of schools is to encourage student growth and to foster positive self-development. This could explain why the participants stressed differences of opinion and negative feelings of being devalued. As well, since most employees in a school are professionals, they may view conflict differently then non-professionals. Professionals may argue over philosophical differences or pedagogical differences so they may see conflict as being central to their being. Non-professionals, on the other hand, may think of conflict as being more on the surface level, where a struggle for an object or position is more

important than an idea. As well, the definitions provided by the literature may represent a broad spectrum of ideas about conflict and may take in the views of many professions. This study presents the views of a few educators in educational settings and as such, may be limited to that context.

Criteria for Conflict Definition

The literature made no direct reference to what constitutes a conflict. The participants in the study were directly questioned as to how they were aware of conflict happening to them or around them. I feel it is important to note the criteria for active conflict. One way of summarizing active conflict is by knowing someone is "ticked off" with you and this displeasure is evident through verbal or visible expression, attitude or expectations. It is interesting to see that an internal response can also indicate conflict, similar to a "sixth sense." However, this may only indicate conflict on one party's part as a physical reaction will not necessarily be perceived by the other party. In this instance, a conflict may come as a complete surprise, especially if an eruption or outburst of words and emotions occurs with little perceived warning. Finally, the indicator "an issue that simply will not go away" may be typical of the average conflict. This response was given by a support staff member which could indicate that non-certified professionals do in fact view conflict differently then professionals. It is simply a matter of perspective.

Types of Conflict

The literature grouped conflict into eight major themes: intrapersonal, interpersonal, intragroup, intergroup, intraorganizational, person-group, intrasender, and intersender. It made no reference as to which type of conflict occurred most often. In this study, it was discovered that the eight direct

conflicts described fall into the 'interpersonal' type of conflict. I use the term direct because there may have been other underlying reasons as to how the trouble started, but when the actual main conflict occurred, it was between two individuals. In the two cases where the study participant was a mediator to a conflict, the conflict itself took part between two individuals.

This type of conflict has a variety of causes. It is possible that the participants view the education system as at the root of the matter - but that the education system is so vast that it would be difficult to battle or change such a large system and so pick out one of the people in the system to be the target of their next step. It could be that the particular individual in question is the "messenger" and, rather than challenge the message, an individual may challenge the bearer of the good or bad news.

Another reason why interpersonal conflict was most common in this study could be because of individuals wanting their personal spaces respected. When the same group of individuals is always together, it is easier for tempers to flare from time to time. If someone says or does something at the wrong time, the result could be a conflict situation. Also, if someone intrudes on someone's space - e.g., classroom - the individual could feel somewhat attacked and retaliate in any number of ways.

One other reason for interpersonal conflict being most prevalent could be the higher stress and pressure that is often involved in today's schools, perhaps more so in light of the tighter financial situation in which many school boards are finding themselves. When people are stressed by continually being asked to do more with less, it is easier for someone to take offense to what someone else said or did, thereby resulting in a conflictual confrontation.

Sources and Causes of Conflict

The literature suggests that there are four main causes of conflict: communication problems, structure of the organization, human factors, or limited resources. According to the interviews in the study, the causes of each conflict related to each of the above groupings, except limited resources, and it is a fairly even split between the three groups. This is one area that is difficult to explain. One can only assume that since causes and sources of conflict are so varied, it is fairly simple to break down the reasons and categorize them into the four given headings, especially since the four headings cover all the bases for conflict sources.

Effects of Conflict

According to the literature, conflict can be either positive or negative depending on how it is managed or considered by those closest to it. However, most of the effects referred to, describe what happens to the organization when it experiences conflict, and little is said about the effects on those who participate in the conflict. This could be attributed to the fact that most conflict management deals with business or the business aspect of an organization, but little is centered in an educational milieu where the people, not the bottom line, come first.

One of the areas that was not touched on in the literature, was the effect of conflict on the person's self-worth or thymos. I find it interesting how this whole area has been ignored, especially when it can be the key area to prevent or solve most conflict. I was presented with a strong impression that a lot of the conflict experienced by the participants of the study had a considerable effect on how they saw themselves as a person. Strong feelings of being devalued or personally demoted were scattered through their

comments about conflict. As well, little was said or done to counteract these emotions once the conflict was settled, which could leave the individuals in a weakened state, both physically and mentally.

Strategies for Conflict Resolution

The literature tells us that the most common groups of conflict resolution strategies are negotiating, managing information, and influencing. It would appear that these three groups have a commercial or business edge to them and that they would be commonly found in the business world which would often disregard the well being of the individual, but focus on the well being of the organization.

The strategies identified in my interviews could fit into the above mentioned groups, but I believe this would be a disservice to the responses and the participants. They all emphasized the human side of conflict and took into account how the conflict affected themselves and, often the opposing party. Their primary focus was to solve the conflict, but at the same time to keep their dignity intact without resorting to games, cheap shots, or humiliation. The main theme in their strategies was open and honest communication with the goal of resolving the situation by not hurting themselves or anyone else in the process. Although another strong theme that emerged dealt with persuasion, it was regarded as a friendly way to resolve the conflict and by no means was it meant to be a force play or a power play by one individual against another. I believe the main reason that educators choose the open, communicative approach is that it is part and parcel of their nature as educators. Educators want to help others and be seen as helpful and it is rarely in their nature or best interest to be vindictive or malicious toward another teacher for personal gain.

Emotions in Conflict

As I mentioned earlier, there was very little said in regards to emotions and conflict in the literature. However, in completing this research, I realized that the emotions felt by all the participants is vital in understanding how the conflict affects each one of them. It is too simple to say that a conflict situation upset an individual, and that once the conflict was settled the individual was no longer upset. Certain visible conflicts can be the result of a series of smaller internal conflicts that do not see the light of day until enough of them build up and cause an individual to explode for what may seem to be a trivial event. It is critical that when an individual explodes for an apparently inexplicable reason, an administrator or colleague attempt to find out exactly what is happening in that individual's life. To simply blame it on having a bad day or on stress are excuses that can lead to further conflict or upheaval.

It is also important that individuals who are unable to keep their emotions in check when it comes to conflict, are encouraged to seek out professional medical help. This will alleviate the turbulent state of mind when looking at conflict and will facilitate dealing with the conflict alone, sans any extra baggage that does not fit with the conflict. By keeping one's mental health in check, educators can avoid taking every conflict personally and can view each conflict as a learning experience in preventing further conflict.

Significant Conflict

The final area on which this study focused is significance of conflict. As with emotions, little was said in the literature as to the circumstances under which individuals consider conflict to be significant. It is important to have this distinction clearly outlined because it will influence how an

individual reacts to the conflict and will also influence what type of strategy he or she will choose when resolving conflict.

The difficulty associated with significant conflict is establishing a consistent scale by which to judge conflict. Seeing how humans are so diverse, their rating scale for conflict is as diverse. It is, unfortunately, impossible to establish a scale for everyone. This was evidenced in the findings as well. The participants each used a different method of establishing how significant an event was to them. Perhaps the only strategy to better understand this phenomenon is for educators to better understand and know one another. By doing so, people will be aware as to what is occurring in someone's life and will have a better understanding as to why any particular conflict is significant or not, based on present or past experiences.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In reviewing the conclusions presented from this study, there are three areas that lend themselves to recommendations: (a) effects of conflict, (b) strategies for conflict resolution, and (c) emotions in conflict.

The main recommendation when considering the effects of conflict is that educators who are involved in a conflict need to be aware of what is transpiring in all affected parties and that any appropriate measures be implemented to counteract the effect of the conflict. It is up to the administrator of a school to be aware of this or these effect(s) and, if necessary, mandate a course of professional assistance should the effect be severe. This also means that school administrators must be aware of when they, too, are in need of professional assistance.

The second group of recommendations revolves around available strategies for conflict resolution. The individuals or groups that assume the role of conflict manager need to be made aware of what strategies are available to them when resolving conflict. These strategies should be considered fair and just for the type of conflict in question. Finally, individuals charged with the responsibility of conflict resolution need to keep themselves up to date of new or evolving conflict resolution strategies.

The final set of recommendations is centered on emotions in conflict. Here it is vital that conflict managers recognize the stages of emotional distress that can arise because of conflict, and know where help can be found should it be necessary. As well, the strategies used to resolve the conflict should keep the individual's thymos, or sense of self-worth, intact or it should bolster this sense should it be somewhat damaged. Finally, conflict managers should attempt to promote a healthy work environment where morale and attitude are positive. By doing so, any subsequent conflict will focus on the issue at hand and so this will not impede or affect the emotional well being of the individuals.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

For the recommendations mentioned above, a number of implications result. In regards to the effects of conflict, educators must receive specialized training in conflict management and they must be given time and financial resources to investigate the services available to them. Once a certain group of educators has been trained, they in turn can train others around them so that slowly, entire school staffs will be aware of the proper techniques for recognizing the effects of conflict.

In terms of the strategies for conflict resolution, there are a number of resources available to educators. For administrators, it should be a requirement that they receive formalized training in conflict management. They can then pass on any pertinent information to others on staff. As well, information collected about conflict can be disseminated to all staff on a slow, but regular basis. This can alleviate the pressure of having to learn it all at once, but at the same time, will serve as a timely reminder of what is available to them. Another implication could be that educators be formally trained to work on conflict management teams. They could work in their own schools and if necessary, be hired out to other schools to serve as mediators if a staff is experiencing serious conflict.

The final [illegible]of implications centers on the emotional aspect of conflict. In order to reco[illegible]ze the stages of emotional distress, educators must be provided with resources explaining how to do so, as well as have access to trained professionals for assistance or guidance depending on the case. To ensure the strategy selected is appropriate, educators should be trained to sit back and reflect before acting. This should alleviate mistakes caused by jumping in too fast or speaking before thinking. The third implication is that all educators should be proactive, rather than reactive, when it comes to staff morale. There should be organized events where the staff can relax and unwind and talk about what is important to them. Although this can be done on a regular basis in a staff room, sometimes a forced venue, such as a staff retreat where organized events will alleviate stress, will benefit more than the daily natterings in the school. Finally, if administrators learn to apply the 48 hour policy, severe conflict can be avoided. Here, as soon as an administrator learns of a conflict, he or she attempts to resolve or manage the

situation before it becomes unmanageable. This is to be done within 48 hours.

In closing, the key implication in this entire area is that the resources, both financial and material, needed for conflict prevention or management must be made available. Although education funding is severely restrained, the benefits of a healthy, productive staff are immeasurable. Also, the money spent on training and preparing for conflict will be less than the accumulated supply teacher costs from an unhealthy staff. Student achievement is bound to increase as well since teachers will enjoy their profession on a grander scale and will be passing their enthusiasm on to their students.

SUMMARY

This study has been instrumental in outlining several key aspects of conflict and conflict resolution strategies. It has demonstrated how the literature is concurrent to actual practice in certain regards, but at the same time, creates more questions as to why certain differences exist. Therefore, it is reasonable to advise that further research and study are necessary to better understand why these differences exist and how the resolution of conflict can enhance one's personal self-worth and success of conflict resolution. These subsequent studies could focus on a number of aspects related to conflict resolution such as age, gender, education, marital status, and level of self-esteem. Each of these aspects could influence how participants in a conflict view that particular conflict and how they would proceed in a conflict situation.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

The following interview schedule was used while interviewing the participants for this study. Although all the questions were not asked with the same wording, the main point of each question was communicated so that the participants were aware of the focus for each question.

1. Participants were asked to state their name and current position as well as any previous positions they held while working in a school. They were also asked to talk about their hobbies, interests and past times so that they felt more comfortable with the interviewer.

2. Participants were asked to define conflict in their own words. They were also asked what criteria they used to define conflict. As well, they were asked to differentiate, if possible, between positive and negative conflict.

3. Participants were asked to recount an incident of conflict that occurred between themselves and other school staff. They were asked to mention any details that they thought were pertinent to the conflict and if the conflict was settled.

4. From here, participants were asked what strategies they used to end the conflict, if the conflict was resolved, how satisfied they were with the result and their perception of the other party's satisfaction level. They were also asked to mention the effects of the conflict on them and the other party, if they were aware of any.

5. Participants were asked if emotions were a factor in the case, and if they were, what role they played in the conflict.

6. Finally, interview participants were asked if the conflict situation was significant to them. They were also asked how they established significance and how they rated conflict in terms of significance levels.

APPENDIX B

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY

University of Alberta
Department of Educational Policy Studies
Ed N 7-104
Edmonton AB T6G 2G5

Spring, 1996

Dear participant,

My name is Robert Mazzotta and I am a graduate student in Educational Policy Studies at the University of Alberta. As part of my master's requirements, I am conducting research on the types of conflict resolution strategies that are presently being used in schools.
The title is: Conflict in Schools and Possible Resolution Strategies.

I would like your permission to include you in my study. You will be asked to take part in an audio-recorded interview that will last approximately 30 minutes. During this interview, you will be required to discuss a situation of conflict that occurred between yourself and another adult individual in your present or past work place. I will need to know what the conflict was about, how it was resolved, if it in fact was resolved, and how you felt about the situation once it was settled.

I will not identify you or anyone else or even your school by name--no-one will know what you said during the interview or how you feel about the conflict situation. If you decide you no longer want to participate, even after the interview, you can revoke this letter of consent by notifying me personally in writing at the address above. If you have any questions about this project now or later, please feel free to contact me at 478-2064 or my research supervisor, Dr. Joe Fris, at 492-7625.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please indicate this by signing in the space provided below. I will personally collect the letters in one week's time. Thank you.

I, _____ GIVE PERMISSION FOR ROBERT MAZZOTTA TO INCLUDE ME IN THE STUDY AS DESCRIBED ABOVE AND I FULLY UNDERSTAND WHAT IS INVOLVED OF ME FOR THIS STUDY.

_____ _____
Signature Date